



WORDS AND PHRASES OFTEN CONFUSED

5

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will discuss words that are often confused with each other because they are:

1. similar in spelling and different in usage; or
2. similar in spelling and different in pronunciation; or
3. similar in pronunciation but different in usage and spelling; or
4. similar in spelling but different in meaning; or
5. slightly different in spelling but might have similar usage; or
6. words whose usage is commonly mistaken by the non native speaker.

If we analyse the CAT examination questions of 2007 and 2008, we find that these confusing words have found a place in the CAT in the two consecutive years. Although most of the words which had come in CAT 2007 and 2008 have been covered in the vocabulary section of this book, the recurrence of this question type makes it obligatory to devote a full chapter to it.

In linguistics, a homonym is one or a group of words that share the same spelling and the same pronunciation but have different meanings, usually as a result of the two words having different origins.

Some books only require that homonyms share the same spelling or pronunciation (in addition to having different meanings), but these are the definitions most other sources give for *homographs* and *homophones* respectively.

Examples of homonyms are:

- stalk (which as a noun can mean part of a plant, and as a verb to follow/harass a person),
- bear (animal), and bear (carry), leaf (part of a plant or the page of a book).

Some sources state that homonym meanings must be unrelated in origin (rather than just different). Thus *right*

(correct) and *right* (opposed to left) would be polysemous (see below) and not homonyms.

Capitonyms are words that share the same spelling but have different meanings when capitalised (and may or may not have different pronunciations). Such words include polish (to make shiny) and Polish (from Poland).

The word “homonym” comes from the conjunction of the Greek prefix homo- (ὁμο-), meaning “same”, and suffix-*ōnimus* (-ωνιμο), meaning “name”. Thus, it refers to two or more distinct concepts sharing the “same name” or signifier.

Several similar linguistic concepts are related to homonymy. The terms *homograph* and *homophone* are, however, usually defined the same way as meaning “same spelling” and “same sound” respectively, and **heteronym** and **homonym** can be seen as respective subclasses of these.

- **Homographs** are words that share the same spelling regardless of how they are pronounced. Homographs may be pronounced the same, in which case they are also **homophones** – for example, *ball* (toy) and *ball* (form of dance). Alternatively they may be pronounced differently, in which case they are also **heteronyms** – for example, *bow* (the front of a ship) and *bow* (a type of knot).
- **Homophone** can be called as words that share the same pronunciation regardless of how they are spelled. Homophones may be spelled the same (in which case they are also homographs) or spelled differently.
- **Polysemes** are words with the same spelling and distinct but *related* meanings. The distinction between polysemy and homonymy is often subtle and subjective, and not all sources consider polysemous words to be homonyms. So they can be treated differently also. Words such as “mouth”, meaning either the orifice on one’s face, or the opening of a cave or river, are polysemous and may or may not be considered homonyms.

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Examples below illustrate the above given concept:

- bough—a branch on a tree.
- bow—to bend forward at the waist in respect
- bow—the front of the ship
- bow—the weapon which shoots arrows
- bow—a kind of tied ribbon
- bow—to bend outward at the sides
- bo—a long staff, usually made of tapered hard wood or bamboo
- beau—a male paramour

In derivation, **homograph** means “same writing”, **homophone** means “same sound”, **heteronym** means “different name”, and **heterophone** means “different sound”.



1. Abdicate/Abrogate

- We *abandon* things when *abdicating*.
- We *abrogate* things when we abolish them.

2. Accede/Exceed

- *Accede* means “to agree” or “to allow”
- *Exceed* means “to go beyond” or “to surpass” as in
- “Drivers who exceed the speed limit are asking for hefty fines.”

3. Accept (receive)/Except (leave out)

- To *accept* is “to agree to something or to receive something willingly”
- To *except* is “to exclude or omit.”

4. Access (approach)/Excess (too much)

5. Adapt (change)/Adept (skill)/Adopt (choose)

- *Adapt* means “to adjust”
- *adept* means “skilled” and
- *adopt* means “to take as your own”

6. Adverse/Averse

- *Adverse* means “inauspicious” or “hostile”
- *averse* means “disinclined” or “repelled”

7. Advice (suggestion)/Advise (to recommend)

Advice is the noun and *advise* the verb.

- You *advise* someone.
- What you give that person is *advice*.

8. Affluence/Effluence

- *Affluence* is wealth;
- *Effluence* is waste or useless product

9. Aisle/Isle

- An *aisle* is a narrow passageway, especially in a church or store;
- An *isle* is an island

10. Aisle (space,between rows)/Advise (to recommend)

11. All right/Alright

- *All right* is the correct form;
- *alright* is grammatically incorrect.

The misspelling “alright” is nonstandard usage. The two words are separate.

12. Allot (assign, distribute)/A lot (a large amount)

13. Allude (suggest)/Elude (escape)

14. Allusion (suggestion)/Illusion (deception, fantasy)

- *Allusion* is a reference to something literary or historical with which the reader is presumably familiar.
- An *illusion* is a false, misleading, idea.

15. Aloud/Allowed

- *Aloud* means “out loud” or “speaking so that someone else can hear you”.
- *Allowed* means “permitted”.

16. Already (previously)/All ready (completely prepared)

- *Already* means “by this time”
- *all ready* means “prepared”

17. Altar (church table)/Alter (change)

- *Altar*: I was married at the altar of my church.

18. Altogether (entirely)/All together (complete group)

- *Altogether* means “wholly”.
- *All together* means “everybody in a group”

19. Always (at all times)/All ways (all methods)

- *All ways* means “by every way or method”.
- *Always* means “all the time, forever.”

20. Among/Between

- *Between* expresses the joining or separation of two people or things.
- *Among* refers to a group of three or more.

21. Amoral/Immoral

- “Amoral” is a rather technical word meaning “unrelated to morality.”
- When you mean to denounce someone’s behavior, call it “immoral.”

22. Amount/Number

- Write “number” when things can be counted.
- When things are lumped together write “amount”.

23. Annual/Annul

- *Annual* means “yearly”
- *Annul* means to “make void or invalid”

24. Anxious/Eager

- “Anxiety” is unpleasant.
- “Eagerness” is joyous. They are not synonyms.

25. Anyone/Any one

This is quite tricky.

- *Anyone* means “anybody, any person at all”
- *Any one* means “any one person” and is followed by “of”.

26. Appraise/Apprise

- *Appraise* is “to assess or estimate”.
- *Apprise* is “to inform or notify”.

27. Ascent (climb)/Assent (agree)

- *Ascent* is an upward movement;
- *Assent* means “agreement”.

28. Ascribe/Subscribe

- If you agree with a theory or belief, you *ascribe* to it, just as you
- subscribe to a magazine.

29. Assistance/Assistants

- *Assistance* means “help” or “aid”
- *Assistants* is the plural of assistant which means “one who gives help”

30. Assume/Presume

- We “assume” things in the absence of evidence.
- We “presume” things when it is reasonable to do so and there is no evidence to the contrary.

31. Assure/Ensure/Insure

- *Assure* means “to guarantee”
- *Ensure* means “to make sure”
- *Insure* means “to protect against loss or damage”.

32. Attain/Obtain

- *Attain* means “reach”;
- *Obtain* means “get.”

33. Auger/Augur

- *Auger* is a tool;
- *augur* means “to predict” or “a sort of an omen.”

34. Affect (influence)/Effect (result)

- *Affect* is a verb meaning either “to influence” or “to pretend.”
- *Effect* as a verb means “to accomplish or to produce as a result” as a noun, *effect* means “result.”

- *Affect* is a verb; effect is more usually a noun.
- When used as a verb it means “to achieve” or “fulfil” or “realise”

35. Aid/Aide

- We *aid* people when we help them.
- An *aide* is a special assistant.

B

1. Bail/Bale

- You *bail* the boat and *bale* the hay.
- The expression “bail out” meanings “to abandon a position or situation”, and *bale* is a bundle.

2. Baited/Bated

- *Baited* usually refers to traps or snares.
- When the reference is to someone who is hardly daring to breathe, the correct word is always “*bated*”.

3. Ball/Bawl

- To “bawl” is to cry out loudly;
- *ball* is a toy or a plaything.

4. Bare (uncovered)/Bear (carry; the animal)

5. Bazaar (market)/Bizarre (weird)

6. Been/Gone

- *Been* is the past participle of “*be*,” gone is the past participle of “*go*”.
- *Been* is used to describe completed visits, gone does not specify the return or completion of the visit.

7. Bemuse/Amuse

When you *bemuse* someone, you confuse them, and not necessarily in an entertaining way. Don’t confuse this word with “*amuse*.”

8. Benefactor/Beneficiary

- *Benefactors* give benefits;
- *beneficiaries* receive them

9. Beside/Besides

- *Beside* means “at the side of”.
- *Besides* means “in addition to.”

10. Biannual/Biennial

These two are really tricky!

- *Biannual* means happening twice a year;
- *Biennial* means every two years.

11. Birth (childbearing)/Berth (place of rest)

- *Berth* is a place to sleep on a boat or ship or train;

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- *Birth* is the beginning (usually of life).

12. Blonde/Blond

Because these are borrowed from French, there is a feminine and masculine form. *Blonde* is feminine and *blond* is masculine.

13. Blunt/Brunt

- Some people mistakenly substitute the adjective “blunt” for the noun “brunt” in standard expressions like “bear the brunt.”
- *Brunt* means “main force.”

14. Board (plank; food)/Bored (drilled; uninterested)

- *Board* is a long sheet of wood, also a group of people as in “Board of Directors”, and as a verb means to go onto a ship, plane or other form of public transport;
- *Bored* means “not interested.”

15. Bore/Boar/Boor

- *Bore* as a noun is a boring or tiresome person, or something that you don’t like doing;
- *Bore* as a verb is “to drill”.
- *Boar* is a male pig;
- *Boor* is a vulgar person.

16. Born (given birth to, beginning of life)/Borne (carried)

17. Bought/Brought

Bought is the past tense of “buy”, *brought* is the past tense of “bring”. So, I *bought* (paid for) a load of topsoil, and a truck driver *brought* (delivered) it to my home.

18. Braise/Braze

- *Braise* means “to cook slowly in liquid (usually meat)”.
- *braze* most commonly means “to solder with an alloy of copper and zinc”.

19. Breach/Breech

Breach is to break and *breeches* are worn by horse riders on their legs.

20. Break (smash, split)/Brake (stopping device)

21. Breath/Breathe

- When you need to *breathe*, you take a *breath*.
- “Breathe” is the verb, “breath” the noun.

22. Bridal/Bridle

- *Bridal* has to do with brides and weddings;
- *bridle* as a noun means a halter or restraint and as a verb it means to restrain or to draw oneself up in anger.

23. Broach/Brooch

- A decorative pin is a “brooch” even though it sounds like “broach”—a quite different word.
- To broach means “to touch upon or start especially a topic”.

24. By/Buy/Bye

- *By* is a preposition meaning “next to”;
- *buy* means “purchase”; *bye* means “farewell” or “goodbye”.

C

1. Cache/Cachet

- “Cache” comes from the French verb “*cacher*,” meaning “to hide,” and in English is pronounced exactly like the word “cash.”
- But speaking of a *cache* (hidden hoard of weapons, drugs, etc.)
- Often mispronounced to sound like *cachet* is a word with a very different meaning: it was originally a seal affixed to a document but now it refers to the quality attributed to anything with authority or prestige.

2. Callous/Callused

Calling someone *callous* is a way of metaphorically suggesting a lack of feeling similar to that caused by calluses on the skin; but if you are speaking literally of the tough build-up on a person’s hand or feet, the word you need is “callused.”

3. Can/May

- *Can* refers to one’s ability.
- *May* concerns whether one has permission.

4. Canon/Cannon

“Canon” is used for principles or rules and “cannon” refers to a large piece of artillery.

5. Canvas (fabric)/Canvass (examine, campaign for election)

6. Capital (city; wealth)/Capitol (building)

7. Carat/Caret/Carrot/Karat

“Carrots” are those crunchy orange vegetables, but this spelling gets misused for the less familiar words which are pronounced the same but have very different meanings.

- Precious stones like diamonds are weighed in *carats*. The same word is used to express the proportion of pure gold in an alloy, though in this

usage it is sometimes spelled “karat” (hence the abbreviation “20K gold”).

- A *caret* is a proofreader’s mark showing where something needs to be inserted, shaped like a tiny pitched roof. It looks rather like a French circumflex, but is usually distinct from it on modern computer keyboards.
- *Carets* are extensively used in computer programming.

8. Career/Careen

Careening down the road is swerving from side to side, whereas *career* relates to your future, job, etc.

9. Censor (prohibit)/Sensor (measuring device)

- To *censure* someone, however, is to officially denounce an offender

10. Cereal/Serial

- *Cereal* is something you might eat for breakfast, such as porridge.
- *Serial* is something in a series; something that continues one after another.

11. Choose (to select)/Chose (past tense of choose)

12. Chunk/Chuck

- *Chunk* is a big piece, whereas *chuck* means “to throw”.

13. Cite/Site/Sight

- *Cite* means “to indicate”.
- A *site* is a place.
- *Sight* is vision.

14. Click/Clique

- To *click* is to push a button, or switch; to emit or make a slight, sharp sound, or series of such sounds; and *clique* is a small exclusive group of friends or associates.

15. Coarse (rough)/Course (way, path)

16. Collaborate/Corroborate

- *Collaborate* means “to work with someone”;
- *Corroborate* means “to establish the truth of something”.

17. Collage/College

You can paste together bits of paper to make a *collage*, but the institution of higher education is a *college*.

18. Come over/Overcome

- *Come over* is a phrasal verb, that can mean several things. It can mean “to move from one place to another” or “move towards someone”.

- *Overcome* is a verb, which means “to defeat or succeed in controlling or dealing with something”.

19. Compare/Contrast

- You *compare* like objects for both similarities and differences.
- You *contrast* any two things (like or unlike) by identifying dissimilarities.

20. Complement (make complete, to supplement)/Compliment (praise)

21. Concentrate/Concentrated

- When you *concentrate* (verb) you direct all your efforts towards a particular activity, subject or problem. If something is *concentrated* (adjective) it means it has had some liquid removed.

Note: The simple past of “to concentrate” is “concentrated” and this is where the confusion may arise.

22. Connote/Denote

The literal meaning of a word is its *denotation*; the broader associations we have with a word are its *connotations*.

23. Conscience (moral sense)/Conscious (aware)

24. Conscience/Conscious/Consciousness

- Your *conscience* makes you feel guilty when you do bad things.
- *Consciousness* is your awareness.
- If you are awake, you are *conscious*.

25. Consul/Council/Councilor/Counsel/Counselor

- *Consul* is a diplomat to a foreign country.
- *Council* refers to a group to discuss and take action on official matters.
- A *councilor* is a member of such a group.
- *Counsel* is advice or to advise.
- A *counselor* is an adviser.

26. Continual/Continuous

Continual means “something that happens” frequently, with breaks between the occurrences. *Continuous* means “something that happens without stopping”.

27. Convince/Persuade

- We *persuade* people to act.
- We *convince* when using proof to accept a belief. Hence, we usually are “*convinced*” something is true, but others try to “*persuade*” us to do something.

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28. Cooperation/Corporation

- *Cooperation* “(usually spelt without the hyphen in US English)” means working together;
- *Corporation* is a business organisation.

29. Copyright/Copywrite

- *Copyright* is the legal ownership of a book, film, play, piece of artwork, musical composition, etc. or the right to print, publish, film, record or perform them.
- *Copywrite* is something you do if you are creating advertising or publicity material.

30. Core/Corps/Corpse

- Apples have *cores*.
- A *corps* is an organisation, like the Peace *Corps*. A *corpse* is a dead body, a carcass.

31. Correspondence/Correspondents

Correspondence is written communication; *correspondents* are those who write it.

32. Creak/Creek

- *Creak* is both a noun and a verb and means “squeak or groan” (for instance, rusty hinges and loose floorboards creak);
- *Creek* is a noun and means a “waterway” or “stream”.

33. Credible/Creditable

- *Credible* means “believable”;
- *Creditable* means “praiseworthy” or “deserving credit.”

34. Credible/ Credulous

- “Credible” means “believable or trustworthy.” It is also used in a more abstract sense, meaning something like “worthy”.
- Don’t confuse “credible” with “credulous,” a much rarer word which means “gullible.”

35. Crevice/Crevasse

- *Crevice* are by definition tiny, like that little
- *crevice* between your teeth where the popcorn hulls always get caught.
- A huge crack in a glacier is given the French spelling, *crevasse*.

36. Criteria/Criterion

Criterion is singular; *criteria* is plural.

Criterion is in the case of a single specification.

Criteria is in the case of more than one specification.

37. Cue/Queue

“Cue” has a variety of meanings like a clue or a play instrument as in a game of billiard, but all uses of “queue” relate to its original French meaning of “tail,” which becomes a metaphor for a line.

38. Curb/Kerb

Curb means “to control” as in “curb your temper”, while *kerb* is the edge of a footpath or sidewalk.

39. Currant/Current

Currant is a fruit, usually dried.

- *Current* as an adjective which means “contemporary”, or “fashionable”; as a noun it means “stream,” or “flow”.

40. Cursor (computer marker)/Curser (swearer)

D

1. Dairy (milk-producing farm)/Diary (daily book)

2. Data/Datum

- The dictionaries treat *data* as a group noun meaning information, especially facts or numbers, collected for examination and consideration.
- Strictly speaking *datum* is the singular form of *data* which is the the plural form.

3. Dateline/Deadline

The word “dateline” is used today mainly to label the bit of text at the top of a printed news story that indicates where and—often, but not always—when it was written.

- *Deadline* is most often the date by which something must be accomplished.

4. Decent/Descent

- *Decent* is an adjective meaning “socially acceptable” or “good.”
- *Descent* is a noun which means a “movement downwards” or “your ancestry.”

5. Definite/Definitive

- “Definite” means “certain (a word you can do without since it adds redundant stress).
- “Definitive” means “conclusive and unamendable.”

6. Defuse/Diffuse

You *defuse* a dangerous situation by treating it like a bomb and removing its fuse.

- To *diffuse*, in contrast, is to spread something out.

7. Depreciate/Deprecate

To *depreciate* something is to actually make it worse, whereas to *deprecate* something is simply to speak or think of it in a manner that demonstrates your low opinion of it.

8. Dessert (sweet food)/Desert (dry land) Dessert

- A *desert* (pronounced des' ert) is a dry region.
- To *desert* (pronounced desert') is to leave.
- The *dessert* is the last part of a meal.

9. Device (a mechanism)/Devise (to arrange)

- *Device* is a noun, meaning a "gadget" or (particularly in writing terms) an "invention";
- *devise* is a verb, meaning to "invent" or "plot".

10. Different from/Different than

- Although both *different from* and *different than* are common American usages, the preferred idiom is *different from*.

11. Dilemma/Difficulty

A *dilemma* is a difficult choice, not just any *difficulty* or problem.

12. Disburse/Disperse

You *disburse* money by taking it out of your purse (French "bourse") and distributing it.

- *Disperse* means "to scatter."

13. Discreet, discrete

- *Discreet* means "respectful," or "prudent;"
- *Discrete* means "separate" or "detached from others."

14. Disinterested/Uninterested

- *Uninteresting* people are bored, but *disinterested* people are impartial. We are tried by "a *disinterested* jury of our peers."

15. Don't have to/Mustn't

- We have to use
- (*or do not have to*) to say that there is no obligation or necessity to do something.
- *Mustn't/must not* is a modal verb used to show that something is not allowed. When you use *mustn't* you are telling people not to do things.

16. Downside/Underside

- *Downside* is a noun that means "the disadvantage of a situation".
- *Underside* is a noun that means "the side of something that is usually nearest the ground".

17. Draft/Draught

- *Draft* refers to the first writing of your novel or story (or any other document). You can also be *drafted* (enlisted or recruited) into the army, navy, etc.
- *Draught* is an air movement, a drink (as in "draught of ale")

18. Dredge/Drudge/Trudge

- You use machinery to scoop stuff up from underwater called a *dredge*, to *dredge* up junk or debris from the bottom of a river or lake.
- To *drudge* is to do hard, annoying work; and a person who does such work can also be called a *drudge*.
- When you slog laboriously up a hill, you *trudge* up it.

19. Dribble/Drivel

- *Dribble* means "to drool."
- When you mean to criticise someone else's speech as stupid or pointless, the word you want is *drivel*.

20. Dual (having two parts)/Duel (fight between two people)**21. Dye (color)/Die (perish)****E****1. Ecology/Environment**

Ecology is the study of living things in relationship to their *environment*.

2. Elicit (draw forth)/Illicit (improper)**3. Emigrant/Immigrant**

- An *emigrant* is a person who moves out of a country;
- An *immigrant* is one who moves into a country.
- A similar distinction holds for the verbs *emigrate* and *immigrate*.

4. Eminent (noteworthy)/Immanent (inherent)/Imminent (impending)

- *Eminent* means "distinguished;" or "famous;"
- *Imminent* means "near", or "close at hand".
- The rarest of the three is *immanent*, used by philosophers to mean "inherent" and by theologians to mean "present throughout the universe."

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5. Empathy/Sympathy

- If you think you feel just like another person, you are feeling *empathy*.
- If you just feel sorry for another person, you're feeling *sympathy*.

6. Endemic/Epidemic

- An *endemic* condition is one characteristic of a particular region, population, or environment: a condition need not affect a majority or even a very large number of people in a population to be *endemic*. In biology, an endemic disease is one that is maintained locally without the need for outside influence.
- An *epidemic* condition is widespread, or rampant.

7. Enormous/Enormity

- Big things are *enormous*.
- A heinous or atrocious thing has *enormity*.

8. Ensure (make certain)/Insure (indemnify)

9. Envelop/Envelope

- To wrap something up in a covering is to *envelop* it.
- The specific wrapping you put around a letter is an *envelope*.

10. Envious/Jealous

Although these are often treated as synonyms, there is a difference.

- You are *envious* of what others have that you lack.
- *Jealousy*, on the other hand, involves wanting to hold on to what you do have

11. Epic/EPOCHS

- An *epoch* is a long period of time, like the Pleistocene Epoch.
- An *epic* is a lengthy narrative poem, ordinarily concerning a serious subject containing details of heroic deeds and events

12. Epigram/Epigraph/Epithet

- An *epigram* is a pithy saying, usually humorous.
- An *epigraph* is a brief quotation used to introduce a piece of writing or the inscription on a statue or building.
- An *epitaph* is the inscription on a tombstone or some other tribute to a dead person.
- In literature, an *epithet* is a term that replaces or is added to the name of a person. You are more likely

to encounter the term in its negative sense, as a term of insult or abuse: "the people hurled *epithets* at the police who had arrested her."

13. Etymology/Entomology

- "Etymology" is the study of the origins of words. "Entomology" is the study of insects.

14. Everyday (ordinary)/Every day (each day)

15. Everyone/Every one

- *Everyone* means "every person in a group".
- *Every one* means "each person" and is always followed by "of".

16. Evoke/Invoke

- The action of "invoking" is usually more direct and active. It originally involved calling upon or summoning up a god or spirit. An invocation calls upon whatever is invoked to do something or serve a function. *Invoke* now can also be used to mean "to appeal to," or "to cite".
- *Evoke* is usually less purposefully active, more indirect, often used to mean "suggest."

17. Exalt/Exult

- When you celebrate joyfully, you *exult*.
- When you raise something high (even if only in your opinion), you *exalt* it.

18. Exasperate/Exacerbate

People get *exasperated* (irritated); situations get *exacerbated* (made worse).

19. Exercise (activity)/Exorcise (drive out)

F

1. Fair (just)/Fare (food; fee)

- *Fair* means "average", "good-looking", "pale", "unbiased" (what a lot of meanings for one little word!);
- *fare* is the money you pay to go somewhere by bus, train, plane, etc.

2. Fatal/Fateful

- A *fatal* event is a deadly one;
- A *fateful* one is determined by fate.

3. Faze (disturb)/Phase (stage)

To *faze* someone is to fluster or confuse them, whereas *phase* is mostly used in reference to a stage in someone's life—though it can be a stage in almost anything else.

4. Fearful/Fearsome

- To be *fearful* is to be afraid.
- To be *fearsome* is to cause fear in others.
- Remember that someone who is fierce is fearsome rather than fearful.

5. Feel/Believe

You can *feel* tired, *feel* happy, or *feel* angry, but a belief describes your assessment of a proposition. One way to tell if you are dealing with true feelings is this test: Restate the sentence and substitute the word “am” for the word “feel.” If the sentence makes sense, you have isolated a feeling. If not, substitute the word “belief”.

6. Feint/Faint

- A *feint*, whether in chess or on the battlefield, is a maneuver designed to divert the opponent’s attention from the real center of attack.
- A *feint* is a daring move. It might also mean to make a false show of; simulate.
- While “faint of heart” (or “faint at heart”), implies timidity or to *faint* means “to lose consciousness”.

7. Fewer/Less

- *Fewer* is used to describe things that can be counted.
- *Less* refers to quantity or degree.

8. Fiance/Fiancee

- Your *fiance* is the man you plan to marry;
- your *fiancee* is the woman you plan to marry.

9. Flammable/Inflammable

The prefix “in” does not indicate negation here; it comes from the word “inflamm.” *Flammable* and *inflammable* both mean “easy to catch on fire”.

10. Flare/Flair

- *Flare* means “to flash” or “blaze” and “(as a noun) is a pyrotechnic device; it also means to spread gradually outward, as the end of a trumpet, the bottom of a wide skirt, or the sides of a ship;”
- *Flair* means “ability” or “skill.”

11. Flaunt/Flout

- When you show off something or boast about it, you *flaunt* it.
- When you *flout* something you show your contempt for it.

- In passing, it might be noted that a flautist also is one who plays the flute and in Middle English “to *flout*” meant to play the flute.

12. Flounder/Founder

- When something thrashes about, it *flounders*. When it fails completely, it *founders*.

13. For/Since

- The prepositions *for* and *since* are often used with time expressions.
- *For* indicates a period of time.
- *Since* indicates a point in time.

14. Forbear/Forebear

- *Forbear* means “to refrain from”;
- *Forebear* is an ancestor or forefather.

15. Forego/Forgo

- The ‘e’ in “forego” tells you it has to do with going before. It occurs mainly in the expression “foregone conclusion,” a conclusion arrived at in advance.
- *Forgo* means “to abstain from or do without”.

16. Foreword/Forward

- *Foreword* is the preface in a book, usually written by someone who is not the author.
- *Forward* means “ahead, near the front.”

17. Formerly (at an earlier time)/Formally (according to a pattern, formal)**18. Forth/Fourth**

- *Forth* means “forward”;
- *Fourth* is after “third”.

19. Fortunate/Fortuitous

- If something *fortunate* happens, we got lucky.
- If it happened by chance, it is *fortuitous*.

20. Foul/Fowl

- *Foul* can mean “dishonourable” (by foul means), “disgusting” (a foul smell), “entangle” (rubbish dumped in the river can foul fishing lines);
- *Fowl* is a bird.

21. Found/Founded

- *Found* is the past tense of find;
- *founded* means “started”.

22. Full/Fulsome

- When things are *full* they contain abundant supplies of something.
- When things are *fulsome* they are fat, excessive, and offensive to good taste.

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23. Furthest/Farthest

Generally, in good usage, *farther* is used for comparisons of distance and *further* for anything else. *Farther* is used for physical distance; *further* for non-physical.

G

1. Gaff/Gaffe

Gaffe is a French word meaning “embarrassing mistake,” and should not be mixed up with *gaff*: a large hook.

2. Gamut/Gantlet/Gauntlet

- A *gamut* is a full range or scope of things.
- A *gantlet* is a form of punishment in which people run between rows of people who attempt to beat them.
- A *gauntlet* is a glove thrown down when a person is challenged to a duel.

3. Gender/Sex

- Do not substitute the word “gender” to avoid embarrassment. People and animals differ by sex. Words differ by gender. Thus, unless a study involves gender classifications of words, it is a study of *sex* differences.

4. Gibe/Jibe

- *Gibe* means “to taunt”;
- *jibe* means “to agree, correspond or tally”; in boating it means to shift the sails.

5. Gig/Jig

- To *jig* is to move with a quick, jerky motion or hop; or bob. “The jig is up” is an old slang expression meaning “the game is over—we’re caught.”
- A musician’s job is a *gig*; also, a *gig* is a light, two-wheeled one-horse carriage.

6. Gild/Guild

- You *gild* an object by covering it with gold;
- a *guild* is a group or an organisation of people doing similar things.

7. Good/Well

- *Good* is an adjective. Do not use it to modify a verb.
- *Well* is an adverb except in three uses:
 - (i) when used to mean “healthy,”

(ii) when used to mean “neatly groomed” or “attractively dressed,” and

(iii) when used to mean “satisfactory.”

8. Gorilla (ape)/Guerilla (fighter)

9. Grisly/Grizzly

- *Grisly* means “horrible”;
- A *grizzly* is a bear.

H

1. Hail/Hale

- *Hail* means “to greet or to come from”; and as a noun it is frozen raindrops;
- *hale* means “healthy or (as a verb) to haul.”

2. Hanged/Hung

- A criminal is always *hanged*;
- A picture is *hung*.

3. Hard/Hardly

- *Hard* is an adjective. It can mean “solid”, “industrious”, or “difficult”.
- *Hardly* is an adverb and means only just or certainly not.

4. Hardy/Hearty

- *Hardy* is durable, whereas *hearty* is healthy or happy as in “hale and hearty.”

5. Hear (perceive)/Here (in this place)

6. Hear/Listen

- *Hear* is a verb that means “to receive or become aware of a sound using your ears, so you don’t have to make an effort in order to just hear something.”
- *Listen* is a verb that means “to give attention to someone or something in order to hear them, so you make an effort in order to hear something properly.”

7. Heard (perceived)/Herd (group of animals)

8. Heel (part of foot)/Heal (to make better)

9. Heroin (drug)/Heroine (principle female character)

10. He’s/His

- *He’s* is the short form of “he is” or “he has”.
- *His* is a possessive pronoun, it is used to show something belonging to or connected with a man, boy or male animal that has just been mentioned.

11. Historic/Historical

An event is *historic*, whereas a place is *historical*.

12. Hoard/Horde

- *Hoard* means “to stockpile” and as a noun it is a cache of stockpiled stuff;
- *Horde* is a large group.

13. Hole (opening)/Whole (entire)**14. Holiday/Weekend**

- A *holiday* (noun), refers to time, often one or two weeks, when someone does not go to work or school but is free to do what he/she wants, such as travel or relax. You usually have to book your holiday with your boss.
- The *weekend* (noun) refers to the time from Saturday and Sunday, or Friday evening until Sunday night. It's the part of the week in which most paid workers living in the West do not go to work. It is a time for leisure and recreation, and/or for religious activities.

15. Holy (sacred)/Wholly (entirely)**16. Home/Hone**

- *Home* is your house or abode.
- *Hone* means to sharpen.

17. Homework/Housework

- *Homework* (noun) refers to tasks assigned to students by teachers to be completed mostly outside of class, and derives its name from the fact that most students do the majority of such work at home.
- *Housework* (noun) refers to domestic household chores such as cleaning and cooking.

18. “How do you do?”/“How are you?”/“How do you do?”

This is not a question. It is another, very formal way of saying “Hello”. It is also very British. We only really use it the first time we meet someone.

How are you? This is a question.

19. Human (of people)/Humane (merciful)**I****1. I/me**

Usually we choose the correct form by instinct.

- *I* like tea.
- Give *me* my tea.

There are other times when people make mistakes with these two pronouns. *I/me* is difficult when it is coupled

with another pronoun or with a noun. This is when you have to think about the subject/object in a sentence.

2. Idea/Ideal

Any thought can be an *idea*, but only the best ideas worth pursuing are *ideals*.

3. If/Whether

- Use *whether* when alternatives are involved (“I do not know whether I should complain or remain silent”).
- Otherwise *if* is acceptable (“I do not know if I should reconsider my decision”).

4. Illude/Elude

Illude is a very rare word, most of whose former meanings are obsolete, but which can mean “to deceive” or “lead astray.” But *elude* means to “escape” or “evade”.

5. Illusion/Delusion

- *Illusions* are images of nonexistent things.
- *Delusions* are misguided beliefs people hold despite evidence to the contrary. Thus, “Daydreams can be enjoyable *illusions*, but *delusions* of grandeur come from self deceit or mental imbalance.”

6. Immemorial/Immortal

- *Immemorial* means ancient beyond memory (as in the cliché “since time immemorial”);
- *immortal* means “deathless” or “eternal.”

7. Immigrate (come in)/Emigrate (leave)**8. Imply/Infer**

- *Imply* means “to suggest something”.
- *Infer* means “to derive a certain meaning from a remark or an action”. We *imply* things when we suggest them without actually saying so.
- We *infer* conclusions from evidence by reasoning from data to claims.

9. In/Into

- *In* means “inside something.”
- *Into* tells of motion from the outside to the inside of something.

10. Incredulous/Incredible

Use *incredible* in the casual sense of “unbelievably good” and use *incredulous* to mean “unbelieving” or “skeptical”, which is the only standard usage for this word.

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11. Inside of/Outside of

- *Inside of* and *outside of* generally should not be used as Compound prepositions.
- *Inside of* is acceptable in most formal writing when it means “in less than”. The more formal term is *within*.
- Both *inside of* and *outside of* are appropriate when *inside* or *outside* is a noun followed by a phrase.

12. Insight/Incite

- An *insight* is something you have: an understanding of something, a bright idea about something.
- To *incite* is to do something: to stimulate some action or other to be taken.

13. Install/Instill

You *install* equipment and you *instill* feelings or attitudes.

14. Interested/Interesting

- *Interested* is a past participle. When used as an adjective it says how someone feels.
- *Interesting* is a present participle. When used as an adjective it describes the people or things that cause the feelings.

15. Intolerable/Intolerant

- *Intolerable* means “tiring, onerous, crushing.” Someone cannot be intolerable of another’s beliefs.
- *Intolerant* means “biased” or “prejudiced.”

16. Intricate/Integral

- An *integral* part of a machine, organisation, or idea is a necessary, inseparable part of it.
- Whereas *intricate* means small or complex.

17. Irregardless/Regardless

There is no such word as *irregardless*; the correct word is *regardless*.

18. Its (possessive of it)/It’s (contraction of it is)

This is confusing because possessives normally have an apostrophe, but in this case *it’s* is short for *it is* and *its* is possessive—*always*.

K

1. Knew/New

- *Knew* is the past tense of *know*;
- *new* is the opposite of *old*.

2. Know (be aware)/No (negative, not yet)

L

1. Later (subsequently)/Latter (last thing mentioned)

- *Later* means “afterwards”;
- *latter* is the second of two things.

2. Laudable/Laudatory

- Something *laudable* is worth praising.
- *Laudatory* activity is the expression of such praise.

3. Lay down/Lie down

- *Lay down* has several different meanings.
- If you *lay* something *down*, it can mean you officially establish a rule, or officially state the way in which something should be done.
- If you *lay down* your weapons, it means you stop fighting.
- If you *lay* wine *down*, it means you are storing it for drinking in the future.
- *Lie down* means to move into a position in which your body is flat, usually in order to sleep or rest.

4. Lay/Lie

- *Lay* is an irregular transitive verb (lay/laid/laid – laying). It needs a direct object. It means “to put something or someone down” (often in a horizontal position).
- *Lie* is an irregular intransitive verb (lie/lay/lain – lying). It does not take a direct object. It means “to rest in a horizontal position” or “to be located somewhere.”
- *Lie* also means “to say something that isn’t true”; it takes the following form (lie / lied / lying).

5. Leach/Leech

Water *leaches* chemicals out of soil or colour out of cloth, while *leech* is a bloodsucking creature.

6. Lead/Led/Lead

- *Lead* (pronounced leed) means “to go first”.
- *Led* is the past tense of *lead*.
- *Lead* is a heavy metal; also the graphite in a pencil.

7. Least/Lest

There are uses of old word *lest* in phrases like “*lest* we forget,” referring to something to be avoided or prevented.

- *Least* means something that is very less; it is the opposite of most.

8. Legend/Myth

Myths are generally considered to be traditional stories whose importance lies in their significance, whereas *legends* can be merely famous deeds.

9. Lend/Loan

- *Lend* is a verb meaning “to give something temporarily to someone”.
- *Loan* is a noun, meaning the temporary transfer of something to someone else. So, “Dad, can you loan me a few dollars until pay day?”

10. Lesson (instruction)/Lessen (reduce)

- *Lessen* means “to make less”.
- *Lesson* is something you learn.

11. Liable/Libel

- *Liable* means “subject to” or “answerable for” or “likely”;
- *Libel* is written (as opposed to spoken) untruths about someone, for which you may be taken to court.

12. Licence/License

In British usage, *licence* is always the noun and *license* the verb.

13. Lie/Lay

- *Lie* means “to recline”. When you recline, you *lie* down. If you tell someone you will *lay* down, you may risk embarrassment. For reclining, the past tense is *lay* and the past participle is “*lain*.”
- *Lay* means “to put or place something”.
- Thus, you may say “I have lain on my bed for half an hour,” but you cannot write “I have laid on the lounge chair for half an hour.” On the other hand, you may “lay the plate on the table,” in which case all past tense forms are the word “laid.” By the way, once you “lay” the plate on the table, it *lies* there until moved.

14. Lightening/Lightning

- *Lightening* means making “lighter” or “brighter”;
- *Lightning* (which is always a noun) is what comes out of the sky, usually followed by a crack of thunder.

15. Like/As/As if

While the use of *like* as a conjunction is common in speaking, its use *as* a conjunction is not fully

established in writing. *Like* is better used as a preposition.

16. Look at/Watch

- In this context, *look* is usually followed by the preposition *at*. When you *look at* someone or something you are interested in the appearance. Generally we *look at* things that are static.
- *Watch* is a verb. When you *watch* someone or something you are interested in what happens. Generally we *watch* things that move or change state.

17. Like/As

- Do not confuse them. *Like* means that one is drawing a similarity from dissimilar groups. The error is created when one uses “like” as a conjunction. The person should substitute “as” for “like”.

18. Literally/Figuratively

- Do not confuse these words.
- *Literally* means that one’s words describe what actually occurred. Most of the time, the word is tossed into sentences in which it is unnecessary.
- The word “figuratively” means that one is using language metaphorically.

19. Look after/Look for

- To *look after* means “to take care of” or “be in charge of something or someone.”
- To *look for* means “to try to find something or someone.”

20. Look over/Overlook

- *Look over* is a phrasal verb. When you *look over* something or someone you quickly examine it or them.
- *Overlook* is a verb. When you *overlook* someone or something, you fail to notice or consider it or them.

Note:

If you *look forward/forwards*, it simply means you are looking ahead of you. *Look forward to* is a phrasal verb. When you *look forward to* something, you feel happy and excited about something that is going to happen.

21. Loose (not snug)/Lose (to misplace, fail to win)

- *Loose* means “to be free, not close together”.
- To *lose* means “to suffer loss.”

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- *Lose* always means “mislaying or dropping something and not being able to find it”, while *loose* means “slack” or “free”.
- *Loose* is an adjective. If something isn’t fixed properly or it doesn’t fit, because it’s too large, or because its not tight enough, it’s loose.
- *Lose* is a verb that means “to no longer possess something because you do not know where it is, or because it has been taken away from you.”

22. Luxurious/Luxuriant

- *Luxurious* living means that you enjoy luxuries.
- *Luxuriant* means that something (such as a plant) is growing abundantly.

M

1. Madding/Maddening

- “A *madding* crowd” is a group of people who can drive you insane.
 - “A *maddening* crowd” is a group of people who make you angry.
- Hardy’s novel is *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

2. Mantel/Mantle

- *Mantel* is the shelf above a fireplace, or the fireplace surrounding;
- *Mantle* is a cloak or blanket.

3. Manufacture/Manufacturer

When your company makes stuff, it *manufactures* it; but the company itself is a *manufacturer*.

4. Marshal/Marshall

- *Marshal* is a military officer or a sheriff;
- *marshall* is a verb, as in marshalling yard.

5. Maybe (perhaps)/May be (could be)

6. Me/My

- As between *I* and *me* we usually choose the correct form by instinct.
 - *Me* is used as the object of a verb or preposition. You use *me* to refer to yourself.
- In short answers, we usually use this form.
- *My* is a possessive adjective.

7. Meat (food)/meet (encounter)

8. Medal/Metal/Meddle/Mettle

- A person who proves his or her *mettle* displays courage or stamina.
- The word *mettle* is seldom used outside of this expression. *Metals* are nouns like silver, gold, etc.

- *Medal* is a prize given and *meddle* means “to interfere”.

9. Media/Medium/Median

- “Media” is a plural word. One mass *media* form is a medium.
- *Medium* is also a size between large and small;
- *median* is the mid point.

10. Meet/Mete/Meat

The two more often confused are *meet* and *mete*.

- *Meet* means “to encounter” (and can also mean fit or suitable); *mete* means “to allot, apportion or distribute”; *meat* refers to flesh as food.

11. Militate/Mitigate

- *Militate* is usually followed by “against” in a phrase that means “works against”.
- *Mitigate* means almost the opposite: “to make easier” or “to moderate”. It should not be followed by “against.”

12. Miner (excavator)/Minor (person under a given age)

Children are *minors* (unless they are violating child-labour laws, and) those who work in mines are *miners*.

13. Minimal/Minimum

- A *minimal* amount is the minimum in a data set.
- “*Minimal*” is an adjective and “*minimum*” may be used either as a noun or an adjective.

14. Moral/Morale

- *Moral* means good ; it is also a lesson on conduct.
- *Morale* is a mental condition, spirit (“The team’s morale was low?”).

15. Most/Almost

- *Almost* is an adverb meaning “nearly.”
- *Most* is an adjective meaning “the greater part.”

16. Mucus/Mucous

- *Mucous* membranes secrete *mucus*.
- *Mucus* is the noun and *mucous* is the adjective.

17. Mute/Moot

- *Mute* as a verb means “to silence or quieten down”; as a noun it’s a little gadget used by string players to soften the sound from their instruments; as an adjective, it means dumb or making no sound (as in “He looked at me in mute appeal”.)
- *Moot* means “debatable”. So, it’s a “moot point”.

18. Most/the Most

- *Most* without an article is usually used as an adjective, which means “almost all”.

- *The most* is usually used to form the superlative of many adjectives and adverbs.

19. Mutual/Common

- *Mutual* refers to two people who share the same emotion, as in “My friend and I have *mutual respect*”.
- *Common* refers to something shared by at least two people, such as “a *common goal*” or “a common point of departure”.

N

1. Naïve/Knave

- A *knave* is an unprincipled, untrustworthy, or dishonest person, whereas *naïve* means “having or showing unaffected simplicity of nature or absence of artificiality” or “unsophisticated or ingenuous”.

2. Naval/Navel

- Your belly button is your *navel*, and “navel oranges” look like they have one;
- all terms having to do with ships and sailing require *naval*.

3. No/Know

Strange that these two should get confused, but they do.

- *No* is always the opposite of “yes”;
- to *Know* is to be certain.

O

1. Once/Ones

- *Once* always has to do with time and answers the questions, “how many times?” or “when?”
- In contrast, *ones* have to do with things.

2. Oppress/Repress

Dictators commonly *oppress* their citizens and *repress* dissent, but these words don’t mean exactly the same thing.

- *Repress* just means “keep under control.” Sometimes *repression* is a good thing.
- *Oppression* is always bad, and implies serious persecution.

3. Oral/Verbal

- Some people insist that *verbal* refers to anything expressed in words, whether written or spoken,

while *oral* refers exclusively to speech; but in common usage *verbal* has become widely accepted for the latter meaning.

- However, in case of a legal context, an unwritten agreement is still an “*oral contract*,” not a “*verbal contract*.”

4. Oriental/Asian

- *Oriental* is generally considered old-fashioned now, and many find it offensive.
- *Asian* is preferred for telling about Asia.

It baffles me that people get these mixed up, but they do.

5. Overdo/Overdue

- *Overdo* means “to exaggerate” or “carry to something too far”;
- *overdue* is what your bills are, when you forget to pay them!

6. Overtake vs Takeover/Take over

- *Overtake* is a verb. It can mean to go beyond something by being better, or if you’re driving to come from behind another vehicle or a person and move in front of it.
- *Takeover* as a noun is used when one organisation gains control of a company by buying most of its shares.

P

1. Pair (two)/Pare (peel; reduce)

2. Palate/Palette/Pallet/Pellet

- Your *palate* is the roof of your mouth, and by extension, your sense of taste.
- A *palette* is the flat board an artist mixes paint on (or by extension, a range of colours).
- A *pallet* is either a bed (now rare) or a flat platform onto which goods are loaded.
- A *pellet* is a bullet.

3. Parameter/Perimeter

- A *parameter* is a number that describes a population or, metaphorically, a distinctive characteristic of a population of events.
- A *perimeter* is a boundary.

4. Paramount/Tantamount

- *Paramount* means “best” or “top.”
- *Tantamount* means “equivalent”.

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5. Partake/Participate

- *Participate* means “take part”.
- The main modern meaning of *partake* is “consume,” especially in relation to food.

6. Past (an earlier time)/Passed (went by)

7. Patience/Patients

- *Patience* means “forbearance”;
- *patients* are people under medical care.

8. Peasant/Pheasant

pheasant is a favorite game bird whereas *peasants* are rural people or farm workers.

9. Pedalled/Peddled

- *Pedalled* is the past tense of “pedal”, which as a *verb* means to use your feet to turn the pedals on something, such as a bicycle, to make it move; or to operate the pedals on a piano, or the lower keys on an organ;
- *peddled* is the past tense of “peddle”, which means “to sell”.

10. Peek/Pique/Peak

- *Pique* means “to excite or irritate”;
- *peek* means “to peep or snoop”;
- *peak* as a *noun* means the summit or tip, and as a *verb* means “to climax”.

11. Peer/Pier

- *Peer* as a *noun* means “a person who is your equal” and as a *verb* it means to squint or look obliquely at something;
- *pier* is a type of wharf or dock.
- Two other words that sound similar are *pear* (a fruit) and *pare* (to peel).

12. Percent/Percentage

- Use *percent* when identifying a particular number.
- Use *percentage* when there is no definite figure.

13. Perfect/perfectly

- *Perfect* is as singular as it gets.
- *Perfectly* is an adverb used to emphasise another concept.

14. Precedence/Precedents

- Things have *precedence* over others if they are given preference.
- *Precedents* are events that serve as standards.

15. Persecute/Prosecute

- When you *persecute* someone, you’re treating them badly, whether they deserve it or not;

- but only legal officers can *prosecute* someone for a crime.

16. Personal (private)/Personnel (staff)

- *Personal* means “of a person”: “a personal opinion,” “a personal matter.”
- *Personnel* refers to the people in an organisation, especially employees.

17. Persons/People

Use “*people*” if you can. *Persons* usually involves a collection of *people* who are counted or numbered. *People* can refer to a large group of *people*, usually unnumbered. Thus, *people* often can be substituted for *persons*, but *persons* cannot be substituted for *people*.

18. Perspective (angle of view)/Prospective (in the future)

19. Phenomenon/Phenomena

One *phenomenon* or many *phenomena* may exist.

20. Piece (part, portion)/Peace (absence of war)

21. Plain (simple; flat land)/Plane (flat surface; smooth off)

22. Podium/Lectern

- Strictly speaking, a *podium* is a raised platform on which you stand to give a speech;
- the piece of furniture on which you place your notes and behind which you stand is a *lectern*.

23. Pole/Poll

- A *pole* is a long stick.
- You could take a *poll* (survey or ballot).

24. Pour/Pore

You *pour* sauces, gravies, etc., over your dinner, while *pore* means to study something—so, “*pore* over the book”, not “*pour* over the book”.

25. Practice/Practise

In usage, *practice* is always the *noun* and *practise*, the *verb*.

26. Pray (ask, implore)/Prey (hunt down; what is hunted)

27. Perpetuate/Perpetrate

- *Perpetrate* is something criminals do —they *perpetrate* a crime.
- When you seek to continue something, you are trying to *perpetuate* it.

28. Premiere/Premier/Debut

- An actor makes a *debut*, whereas a movie has a *premiere*.

The prime minister of a parliamentary government is known as a *premier*.

- The opening night of a film or play is its *premiere*.

29. Premise/Premises

Premise usually means “assumption” or “supposition” while *premises* means “an apartment, house or building and its grounds”.

30. Presence/Presents

- *Presence* means “being near at hand”;
- *Presents* are gifts.

31. Pretty/Very

- Do not use *pretty* as a synonym for *very*.

32. Principle (rule)/Principal (chief, chief person; sum of money)

33. Proceed/Precede

- To *proceed* is to “go forward”;
- to *precede* means “to go ahead of”.

34. Prodigy/Progeny/Protege

- Your *progeny* are your kids.
- If your child is a brilliantly outstanding person he or she may be a child *prodigy*. In fact, anything amazingly admirable can be a *prodigy*.
- But a person that you take under your wing in order to help promote his or her career is your *protégé*.

35. Profit/Prophet

- *Profit* means “gain”, “earnings”, “advantage”, and is usually associated with business.
- A *prophet* is a seer, a diviner.

36. Prophecy (noun)/Prophecy (verb)

37. Purposely/Purposefully

- Actions are done *purposely* if they are intended.
- Actions are done *purposefully* if the person doing them is very determined.

Q

1. Quiet (silent)/Quite (really, positively, very much)

2. Quotation/Quote

- *Quote* is a *verb*;
- *Quotation* is a *noun*.
- You *quote* people, but you read *quotations*.

R

1. Rain/Reign/Rein

- *Rain* is the water that comes down from clouds;
- *Reign* means “to rule”;
- *Rein* is a strap, usually leather, for controlling an animal, especially a horse.

2. Raise/Raze

These two are exact opposites. *Raise* means “to lift” or “build up” and *raze* means “to pull down”.

3. Rapt/Rapped/Wrapped

- *Rapt* means “enchanted” or “engrossed”;
- *rapped* is the past tense of “rap”, which means “to hit” or “criticise”;
- *wrapped* is the past tense of wrap, to coat or enfold.

4. Rational/Rationale

- *Rational* is an adjective meaning “reasonable” or “logical”.
- *Rationale* is a *noun* which most often means underlying reason.

5. Reality/Realty

- *Reality* is real life.
- *Realty* is real estate.

6. Rebut/Refute

- When you *rebut* someone’s argument you argue against it.
- To *refute* someone’s argument is to prove it incorrect.

7. Refer back/Look back

- A confusion between “look back” and “refer”. This usage is objected to in formal writing on the ground that since the re- of refer means “back,” “refer back” is redundant. *Refer back* is acceptable when it means “refer again”.

8. Reference/Reverence

Reference is something referred to, *reverence* means “respect”.

9. Refute/Reject

- To *refute* someone’s argument is to prove it incorrect.
- If you attempt no such proof but simply disagree with an argument, the word you want is *reject*.

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10. Regimen/Regiment

- *Regimen* is a *noun* and is mostly used to refer to a prescribed way of life, or diet or exercise. It is also the action of governing.
- *Regiment* as a *verb* means “to direct” or “to command”; as a *noun* it refers to a military unit.

11. Remember/Remind

- To *remember* means “to be able to bring back a piece of information into your mind”, or “to keep a piece of information in your memory.”
- To *remind* means “to make someone aware of something they have forgotten or might have forgotten”.

12. Replete/Complete

- *Replete* usually means “stuffed,” “full to overflowing.”
- *Complete* means “finished or total.”

13. Residence/Residents

- *Residence* is a house;
- *Residents* are the people who live there.

14. Respectfully/Respectively

- *Respectfully* means “politely”;
- *Respectively* means “in the order stated.”

15. Retch/Wretch

- *Retch* means “to gag” or “try to vomit”;
- *Wretch* is a grovelling person, a creep.

16. Rifle/Riffle

- *Rifle* (apart from being a firearm) means “to steal”;
- *Riffle* means “to leaf through or browse.”

17. Right (proper, entitlement)/Rite (ceremony)

18. Right/Rite/Write

- *Right* means “correct”;
- *Rite* is a ceremony, usually religious;
- *Write* means “to make words”.

19. Risky/Risque

French-derived word “*risque*” means “slightly indecent” whereas *risky* is dangerous.

20. Road (path)/Rode (past of ride)

- *Road* is a long surface for cars and other vehicles;
- *rode* is the past tense of ride.

21. Role/Roll

- *Role* is a part in a play or film.
- *Roll* as a *noun* is a document or something that is cylindrical in shape and as a *verb*, it means to make something into a cylindrical shape, to turn or spin.

22. Root/Rout/Route

You can “root” for your team (cheer them on) and hope that they utterly smash their opponents—*rout*, then come back in triumph on the straight *Route* (a road).

23. Rye/Wry

- *Wry* means “bent” or “twisted.” Even if you don’t have a wry sense of humor you may crack a wry smile.
- A *rye* is the seed or grain of this plant.

S

1. Sacred/Scared

- Gods are *sacred*.
- The damned in Hell are *scared* (afraid).

2. Sail/Sale/Sell

- You *sail* a boat which has a *sail* of canvas. (*Sail* is part of a ship or boat.)
- You *sell* your old pot at a yard sale.
- *Sale* is either offering something for purchase (“for sale”) or offering it at a special price (“on sale”).

3. Salsa Sauce/Salsa

- *Salsa* is Spanish for “sauce,” so “salsa sauce” is redundant.
- *Salsa* is also a type of dance.

4. Sarcastic/Ironic

- Not all ironic comments are *sarcastic*. Sarcasm is meant to mock or wound.
- *Irony* has an element of sadness.

5. say/said vs tell/told

- *Said* (verb) is the past simple and past participle of “to say”. It can be used in direct speech: It can be used in indirect (reported) speech (followed by that).
- *Said* (adjective) is used before the name of a person or thing you have already mentioned
- *Told* (verb) is the past simple and past participle of “to tell”. It is normally used in reported speech, i.e. it is used to talk about what people say (followed by an object + “that”). When *told* has the meaning of “instruct”, it can be followed by an object and an infinitive.

6. Scene(setting, stage setting)/Seen (perceived)

- *Scene* is the place where something happens.
- *Seen* is the past participle of “see”.

7. Scone/Sconce

- A jam or cream filled biscuit is a *scone*.
- If you are describing a wall-mounted light fixture, the word is “sconce”.

8. Seam/Seem

- *Seam* is most often used to refer to the joining of two pieces of fabric with thread, but it can refer to other types of joints.
- *Seem* means “appear”.

9. Sell/Cell

- *Sell* means “to exchange for money”.
- *Cell* is a small room (invariably lacking in comfort). *Cell* is also an organism (as in “stem cells”). *Cell* is also used to refer to the small divisions in something large such as a container or a table in a web page or word-processed document.

10. Sense (perception)/Since (from that time)

11. Sensual/Sensuous

- *Sensual* usually relates to physical desires and experiences, and often means “sexy.”
- *Sensuous* is more often used for aesthetic pleasures, like “sensuous music.”

12. Serf/Surf

- *Serf* means slave or servant.
- *Surf* is a wave and as a verb is also the action of riding the waves on a board or using a computer to find something on the Internet.

13. Set (to put)/Sit (to be seated)

14. Sever/Severe

- *Sever* means “to separate” or “detach”.
- *Severe* means “grim” or “stern”.

15. Shear/Sheer

- *Shear* means “to cut or clip”.
- *Sheer* means “transparent” (as in “sheer nylon hosiery”) or “steep” (as in “a sheer drop”) or “total” or “absolute” (as in “sheer stupidity”).

16. Sheath/Sheaf

- If you take your knife out of its *sheath* (case) you can use it to cut a *sheaf* (bundle) of paper.

17. Shone (past of shine)/Shown (displayed)

18. Shore/Sure

- *Shore* as verb means “to brace or support” and as a noun, it is usually a beach but can also be “a support” or “a brace”.

- *Sure* means “certain” or “confident”.

- So you do not *sure up* a company by borrowing more capital; you *shore it up*.

19. Shortage/Shortness

- *Shortage* is a noun meaning when there is not enough of something.
- *Shortness* is also a noun meaning the condition of being short spatially (in length).

20. Sick/Ill

- Use “sick” when you mean a person is nauseated.
- Use “ill” when the person is not well but not necessarily nauseated.

21. Silicon/Silicone

- *Silicon* is a chemical element, the basic stuff of which microchips are made. Sand is largely silicon.
- *Silicones* are plastics and other materials containing silicon.

22. Singly/Singularly

- *Singly* means “individually” or “one-by-one”.
- *Singularly* means “strangely” or “uniquely”.

23. Site/Sight/Cite

- *Site* always refers to location or place—building site, archaeology site, etc.
- *Sight* always refers to vision, as in the cliché “a sight for sore eyes”.
- *Cite* means “to summon” or “to refer to a source”.

24. Slither/Sliver

- *Slither* means “to slip” or “to slide”.
- *Sliver* is a noun, meaning a thin piece, such as a flake, paring or chip.

25. So/Such

- *So* when used as in front of an adjective or an adverb means “very”.
- *Such* when used as a determiner can be used in front of a noun or an adjective and a noun to show extremes, you can’t use it in front of adverbs.
- Remember that without the noun you need to use “so”.

26. Soar/Sore

- *Sore* refers to aches, pains and wounds - sore feet, sore backs, and sores on your skin.
- The more unusual word used to describe the act of gliding through the air or swooping up in the sky is *soar*.

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27. Sojourn/Journey

- A *sojourn* is actually a temporary stay in one place.
- If you're constantly on the move, then it is a *journey*.

28. Sole/Soul

- *Sole* as an adjective means "single" and as a noun it is a type of fish and the under part of a foot or a shoe.
- *Soul* generally refers to the invisible part of you that lives on after you die; it also refers to heart or mind or a human being.

29. Some time/Sometime

- This is a common confusion. *Some time* is a period of time and *sometime* means at some time which is not specified.

30. Specially/Especially

- When something is *special*, it is not ordinary.
- *Especially* refers to things that are pre-eminent or primary.

31. Stand/Stance

- When you courageously resist opposing forces, you take a *stand*.
- Your *stance*, on the other hand, is just your position—literal or figurative—which may not be particularly militant.

32. Stationary/Stationery

- *Stationary* means "standing still".
- *Stationery* refers to writing paper.

33. statue/statute/stature

- *Statue* is a carved or moulded likeness.
- *Statute* is law.
- *Stature* means "height" or "status".

34. Stint/Stent

- When the time to work comes, you've got to do your "stint".
- The medical device installed to keep an artery open is a "stent".

35. Straight (not curved)/Strait (narrow place)

- *Straight* means "without bends".
- *Strait* is a passage of water.

36. Suit/Suite

- Your bedroom *suite* consists of the bed, the nightstand, and whatever other furniture goes with it.

- *Suit* is your formal dress.

37. Sulking/Skulking

- That guy sneaking furtively around the neighborhood is *skulking* around.
- *Sulking* is related to your not being in a good mood.

38. To see/To watch

- *To see* means to be aware of what is around you by using your eyes.
- *To watch* means to look at something for a period of time, especially something that is changing or moving. We *watch* things that move, such as TV, a film, sport, etc. while we *look* at static things, such as a photograph, a painting, the stars, etc.

T

1. Tack (angle of approach)/Tact (sensitivity, diplomacy)

2. Taken Back /Taken Aback

- When you're startled by something, you're *taken aback* by it.
- When you're reminded of something from your past, you're *taken back* to that time.

3. Taut/Taught/Taunt

- *Taut* means "tight" or "firm".
- *Taught* is the past tense of teach.
- *Taunt* means "jeer" or "insult".

4. Tenant/Tenet

- *Tenant* is one who rents a property.
- *Tenet* is a principle or belief.

5. Than (word of comparison)/Then (at that time)

6. That/Which/Who

- *That* refers to persons or things,
- *which* refers to things, and
- *who* refers to persons.

7. There/Their/They're

- *There* is a location.
- *Their* is the possessive form of "they".
- *They're* the short form of "they are".

8. Threw (past of throw)/Through (by way of)

9. Throes/Throws

- *Throes* are violent spasms or painful struggles, though not always physical. *Throes* can also mean the "midst of".

- *Throws* means “to hurl” or “to toss”. As a noun, it means blankets or other types of covering.

10. Throne/Thrown

- A *throne* is a chair for a king to sit on.
- *Thrown* is the past participle of “throw”.

11. Tic/Tick

- The word for a spasmodic twitch or habitual quirk of speech or behaviour is spelled the French way: “tic.”
- Tick, as a noun, is a parasitic insect and, as a verb, it is “a mark”.

12. Timber/Timbre

- *Timber* is a type of wood.
- The quality which distinguishes the sound produced by one instrument or voice from others is *timbre*.

13. To(in the direction of)/Too(also)/Two(the number)

- *To* is a preposition meaning “towards”.
- *Too* means “also” or “extremely” (as in “You are walking too fast for me”).
- *Two* is the number after one.

14. Trainee/Trainer

- A *trainee* is a person who is learning and practising the skills of a particular job.
- A *trainer* is a person who teaches skills for a particular job, activity or sport.

15. Troop/Troupe

- A group of performers is a *troupe*.
- Any other group of people, military or otherwise, is a *troop*.

16. Tussle/Tousled

- *Tussle* is a struggle, fight or scuffle
- *Tousled* means “messed up”.

U

1. Unchartered/Uncharted

- *Unchartered* means “lacking a charter” whereas
- *uncharted* means “unmapped” or “unexplored”.

2. Undo/Undue

- The verb “undo” is the opposite of “do.” *Undo* means “to erase or remove something that was done”.

- The adjective “undue” is the opposite of “due” and means “unwarranted” or “improper.” It is used in phrases like “undue advantage”.

3. Unique/Uncommon

- The formal meaning of unique is “sole” or “only” or “being the only one of its kind”.
- The meaning of “uncommon” is “rare” or “unusual”.

4. Upmost/Utmost

- *Upmost* means “uppermost” referring to something on top.
- *Utmost* means “extreme or greatest or maximum”.

5. Used to/Used to do

- *Used to* can be used as an adjective and we use it to talk about things that have become familiar, and are no longer strange or new. You can also be used to doing something.
- *Used to do*—If we say something *used to* happen we are talking about repeated events and actions in the past, usually things that happened a long time ago and are now finished.

V

1. Vane/Vain/Vein

- *Vane* is an instrument that shows from which direction the wind is blowing; it also means the sail of a windmill, the flat part on either side of the *shaft of a feather, a revolving fan or flywheel*.
- *Vain* means too concerned about how one looks or being too conceited and also means useless as in “a vain attempt”.
- *Vein* is a blood vessel, a channel.

2. Vary/Very

- *Vary* means “to change”.
- *Very* describes an extreme form of anything like “very nice,” “very bad”, etc.

3. Venal/Venial

- *Venal* means “dishonest” or “dishonourable”.
- *Venial* means “forgivable” or “unimportant” (as in “venial sins”).

4. Veracious/Voracious

- *Veracious* means “truthful, honest”. A truthful person has “veracity”.

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- *Voracity* means “extreme appetite” and *voracious* means “insatiable” or “ravenous”.

5. Verses/Versus

- *Verses* are the plural of verse, something a poet writes.
- *Versus* means “against” or “in comparison with”.

6. Viable/Vie/Workable

- Something that is *viable* is capable of living (from the Latin *vita* or “life”).
- *Vie* means “compete for”.
- *Workable* means “feasible”.

7. Vicious/Viscous

- *Vicious* means “savage” or “cruel”.
- *Viscous* means “thick and gummy”.



1. Wail/Whale

- One informal meaning of “whale” is “to beat.” Whale also is a large mammal (fish-like).
- To “wail” means “to cry loudly”.

2. Waist (middle of torso)/Waste (squander)

- *Waist* is that part of your body around which you fasten your belt.
- *Waste* as a noun mostly refers to stuff that’s thrown away and as a verb it usually means “to squander”.

3. Wander/Wonder

- *Wander* (verb) means “to travel aimlessly”.
- *Wonder* (verb) means “to consider or question or think about some issue”. *Wonder* (noun) means “the feeling aroused by something strange and surprising”.

4. Wary/Weary

- *Wary* means “careful”.
- *Weary* means “tired”.

5. Wave/Waive

- *Wave* means “to flap your hand in farewell” as a verb. As a noun, it is also a breaker on the beach.
- *Waive* means “to give up one’s rights or claim”.

6. Waver/Waiver

- *Waver* means “to be undecided”.
- *Waiver* means “the giving up of rights or claims”.

7. Ways/Way

- Use “way” when referring to distance.
- Use “ways” when referring to methods

8. Weak (feeble)/week (seven days)

9. Wear (carry on the body)/where (in what place)

10. Weather (atmospheric conditions)/Whether (if, in case)

- Use *whether* as in the phrase “whether or not”.
- Use *weather* when referring to atmospheric or climatic conditions.

11. Wet/Whet

- *Wet* as a verb means strictly to pour liquid on something.
- *Whet* means “to sharpen or stimulate”.

12. Which (what one, one of a group)/Witch (sorceress)

13. Who/Whom

- *Who* is the nominative case (“He is the one who will be elected”), while
- *whom* is the objective case (“He is the one whom you have been seeking”).

14. Whole/Hole

- *Whole* means “entire” (“He ate the whole pie”), while
- a *hole* is an empty hollow (“My dog dug a hole in my yard”).

15. Whose (possessive of who)/Who’s (contraction of who is)

16. Wont/Won’t

- *Wont* means “accustomed”.
- *Won’t* is short form for “will not”.

17. Write/Right/Rite

- *Write* means “to scrawl” or “to pen” or “to put thoughts into readable format”.
- *Right* means “correct”.
- A *rite* is a “ceremony”.



1. Yoke/Yolk

- The yellow center of an egg is its *yolk*.
- The link that holds two oxen together is a *yoke*; they are yoked.

2. Your (possessive of you)/You’re (contraction of you are)